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ABSTRACT

The field of formal evaluation is a newly developing one which requires that training programs encompass new concepts as well as those that are standard in preparing professionals for the field. They should be trained as data gatherers in many roles, they should be aware of new developments and be able to contribute to them. The curriculum make up of three universities, whom the author sees as having successful training programs are examined. Considerations are made as to what factors formal evaluation training programs should meet., such as the differences in training for academicians and a professional evaluators, the content of the program, and the personality types of students selected for these programs. (Author/DEP)

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WHAT ARE WE DOING IN FORMAL EVALUATION TRAINING PROGRAMS?[1]

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What are we doing in formal evaluation training programs? What (in the world) are we doing in formal evaluation training programs? Depending on the inflection used in the title, the content of this paper could take different directions. My intention is to briefly examine the make-up of some of the more successful evaluation training programs and then to describe some of their deficiencies as I see them. Finally, I want to propose a new set of prescriptions based partially on logic, partially on experience, and heavily on intuition. I suspect that not everything I say should be accepted as "the truth" and I hope this paper will serve to stimulate dialogue around at least some points.

Since I have written this paper without the benefit of reviewing the presentations my colleagues prepared for this symposium, I suspect there may be some overlap with topics they are addressing. I hope the overlap is minimal. I suspect, too, that some of what I say will be in conflict with their viewpoints. Yet in the interest of stimulating discussion, I hope the conflict is maximal--at least in certain areas. Because of time restrictions, I cannot cover all themes in this paper as comprehensively as I would wish, but I am prepared to discuss each topic further, and hope we have an opportunity to do so.

What are we doing in formal evaluation training programs?

A few successful evaluation training programs currently exist in our institutions of higher learning. In judging success, I consider the productivity and impact of program graduates in their chosen evaluation endeavors. By training I mean the preparation of persons to either practice or conduct research in educational evaluation. Generally, training can be categorized as either preservice or inservice. I will discuss only formal preservice training programs. Three such programs of which I am aware are the University of Colorado's Laboratory of Educational Research (LER), the University of Illinois' Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation (CIRCE), and the Ohio State University's (recently transformed into Western Michigan University's) Evaluation Center. Consider what each is doing.

LER has a structured set of basic courses in statistics and research design (at least four courses), measurement (at least one course), and evaluation (usually one course). LER concentrates on turning out methodologists who are prepared for university research and/or teaching

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[1] A paper prepared for presentation in a symposium, The Training, Care, and Feeding of Educational Evaluators, Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C., March 31-April 4, 1975. The author wishes to thank Drs. Nick L. Smith and David Churchmen for sharing their ideas on the formal training of educational evaluators. Responsibility for the content of this paper, however, remains in the hands of the author.

positions. Internships with an emphasis on research and methodological consultation are required of all students from the time they enter the program. LER faculty are conducting quality research themselves and are highly visible nationally. Selection of students for the program is structured and includes consideration of the student's past performance in coursework, research and/or evaluation experience, as well as quantitative aptitude and recommendations. Faculty-student interactions on professional topics outside the classroom are frequent (stimulated at least in part by weekly brown bag seminars).

The CIRCE program includes a structured set of basic courses in statistics (at least one course), measurement (at least one course), and evaluation (usually one course). These courses are designed to produce content matter specialists (methodologists, economists, journalists, curriculum specialists, lawyers, etc.) who can apply and are interested in applying their specialized knowledge to educational evaluation. Consulting arrangements involving the faculty are shared with CIRCE students at every opportunity. Apprenticeship arrangements with units throughout the university are established according to students' interests. The CIRCE faculty are involved in quality research and evaluation activities and are highly visible nationally. Selection of students for the program is unstructured. Typically a student's interest in CIRCE is enough to draw him into the fold. Outside of a weekly brown sack seminar and the basic courses already mentioned, the program is not highly structured. The student's interest and university selection and graduation requirements set the direction for participants in the program.

The Evaluation Center's training program has basic courses in statistics (at least one course), measurement (at least one course), and evaluation (at least one course). A student's program is typically defined in consultation with his advisor, who may or may not be a member of the Evaluation Center staff. For the most part, graduates of the Center are prepared to take positions in evaluation. Both masters and doctoral level students are graduated from the program. Students in the program are employed as full- or part-time staff members of the Center. As such, they are involved in evaluation or evaluation-related work commensurate with their interests and level of training. The faculty at the Center teach part time and regularly engage in quality research and evaluation. They are highly visible nationally. Selection of students for the program is structured and includes a recruitment component that permits self-selection even before faculty are contacted. Because students are actually employees of the Center, frequent faculty-student interactions occur on project work outside the classroom. Students are often given professional responsibilities similar to those given full-time practicing evaluation project directors.

What are the reoccurring characteristics of evaluation training programs at these three institutions? Bucknell's Bill Moore and Hugh McKeegan summarized it well a few years ago when they stated:

> ...quality staff, quality laboratories, quality programs,...quality students...are necessary conditions for any quality...program.[2]

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[2]J. William Moore and Hugh F. McKeegan. An Emphasis in Educational Research for the Undergraduate Student. Paper presented at 1970 AERA Annual Meeting.

Current work in evaluation training is being augmented by researchers interested in prescribing directions for developing new evaluation training programs. The AERA Task Force on Research Training has yielded an impressive series of technical papers and a list of competencies needed in educational research and evaluation.[3] The Oregon studies[4] have yielded a similar list; Coller (1970)[5] a similar list, Sanders (1970)[6]..., etc. The outcome statements reflected in these works provide the evaluation trainer and trainee with a target that many feel is worth aiming for. Strategies for hitting that target, suggested by a glimpse at the more successful evaluation training programs, include:

1. Providing basic coursework in statistics, measurement and evaluation
2. Selecting students interested in evaluation
3. Providing supervised field experiences for students
4. Providing faculty actively involved in quality research and evaluation
5. Providing faculty who are nationally visible in educational evaluation
6. Offering frequent, out-of-classroom faculty-student professional interactions

What (in the world) are we doing in formal evaluation training programs?

Is what we are doing sufficient? Is it adequate? I think not. First, consider the roles that evaluation trainees are asked to assume. Generally, there are two categories of roles for evaluators, each of which encompasses a number of secondary roles. They are: (a) professional and (b) academician. The professional is a technician who conducts one evaluation study after another. The academician is a conceptualizer who applies his special skills to improve the practice of educational evaluation. These roles are not mutually exclusive; the academician should have all the skills of the professional and be able to function in that role.

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[3]See, for example, B. R. Worthen, "Competencies for Educational Research and Evaluation," Educational Researcher, 1975, 4, 13-16.

[4]H. D. Schalock and G. R. Sell. The Oregon studies in educational research, development, diffusion, and evaluation; Volume I, Summary Report (with technical appendices). Monmouth, Oregon, Teaching Research Division, Oregon State System of Higher Education, 1972.

[5]A. R. Coller. A taxonomy of programmatic tasks in an educational evaluation, facilitation and coordination system. Northfield, Illinois: Cooperative Educational Research Laboratory, Inc., 1970.

[6]J. R. Sanders. Evaluation training design. In R. L. Turner, et.al. New Patterns for Training R, D, D, and E Personnel. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University, 1970.

With the exception of the Evaluation Center, few professionals are produced by evaluation training programs. Doctoral program graduates are often nominally prepared for that role, but their interests in conducting research or working in their speciality areas (if not research) quickly entice them away from the professional role. The current need to prepare undergraduate and masters level students for the professional role is not being adequately met. The training programs for these people should provide them with the basic knowledge of statistics, measurement, and evaluation they need to conduct evaluation studies under the direction of the academician. This is not a new idea; it has been expressed before. But the need for action remains.

Second, consider the context in which evaluation trainees must work. Sanders and Guba (1973)[7] identified and described a list of nine factors that may (and probably will) influence the quality of an evaluation study:

1. Potential use
2. Audience
3. Methodological
4. Cost
5. Human
6. Knowledge
7. Organizational
8. Legal
9. Political

What formal training prepares evaluation trainees to deal with these factors? What experiences should be provided to students of evaluation to prepare them for "the real world?" Certainly work experience is relevant. But, can the in-again, out-again type of consulting, conducted by university faculty members or short-term project directors adequately communicate the nature of these factors--or instill in students the necessary sensitivity to these factors? If past experience is any indication, the answer is no. Is course work the answer? Not for evaluation trainees.

What, then, can be done that is not already being tried? I propose that a minimum of six months in every professional's or academician's program be set aside for on-site work in evaluation at locations offering a good mixture of the factors listed above. Regional Educational Laboratories and State Departments of Education are two appropriate locations that come immediately to mind. At Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory we have tried this arrangement with evaluation trainees from

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[7] J. R. Sanders and E. G. Guba. A taxonomy of problems confronting the practitioner of educational evaluation. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University, 1973.

Brigham Young University; it has met with considerable success. We are learning to effectively structure apprenticeship experiences.

How should these experiences be structured? An apprentice should be deeply involved in at least one project. He should live with and observe the day-to-day headaches and decisions; he should be given responsibilities so that when mistakes are made, he has to live with them. He should be put into a position such that when questions about appropriate content or strategies for evaluation arise, he alone is forced either to find answers or to find gaps in our knowledge that call for research. Naturally this responsibility cannot be assigned on the first day of work. I suggest, however, that a sequence of experiences can be structured so that a student advances through progressively demanding stages of responsibility. Such advancement can be enacted only through long-term, full-time work experience.

Third, consider the content of formal evaluation training. Content is related to roles for which evaluation trainees are being prepared, but there are some unique considerations related to the content of instruction. Worthen's (1975) list of competencies represents an ideal. Although I genuinely hate to protest a nice number like 25, I suspect this list is incomplete (viz., notice the contextual factors suggested by Sanders and Guba that I suggest should be dealt with by practicing evaluators). A more pressing concern, however, is that this list may unwittingly lead evaluation trainers to conclude that formal training is the only way to impart these competencies, and that every evaluator should be able to function in each competency area. This concern remains even though authors have carefully prepared disclaimers for such lists.

Consider training for the professional. Certainly training in the basic skills of measurement, data analysis, and evaluation planning is essential for the student who does not already have those skills. Selection of students for professional training programs is also important. Personological variables such as independence, interpersonal skills, ability to cope with political and other factors that affect evaluations, flexible content interest, ability to communicate, task orientation and interest in functioning in the technical (as opposed to the research) role are not easily imparted to a student. Therefore, a student entering the program should already demonstrate these characteristics. Experience is also a vital component of professional preparation. The apprenticeship arrangement just discussed offers ideal training for professionals through experience. Finally, the background of potential trainees should be considered. A history of productivity on the job (regardless of the nature of the task), elective courses and/or interest in educationally or socially related subjects, and successful experiences in dealing with people are all important.

Training for the academician should differ. Basic applied and conceptual skills in measurement, data analysis (including computer application), evaluation planning, and project management are essential. A good dose of philosophy of science would also be valuable. This person, I would argue, should not be trained as a specialist in evaluation, however. Rather, his training should be in a substantive area, such as economics,

political science, sociology, quantitative methodology, law, philosophy, and so on. This preparation would enable him to function at the university level in his chosen field. He could then apply his substantive knowledge in studying evaluation as a subject of inquiry. Selection of academicians is as important as selection of professional trainees. The academician should have a genuine interest in studying and improving educational evaluation. He should be interested in applying his conceptual skills to direct the work of others. Like the professional, he should be intelligent, be able to work independently, have high level interpersonal skills, and be able to cope with the contextual constraints of evaluation (although his interest would lie in objective treatment of those constraints as conditions worthy of study). His experience should follow the apprenticeship approach described earlier, but encompass a higher level of conceptual work and managerial responsibility. The products of this experience would of course differ from those of the professional; the academician would be expected to produce conceptual and research papers, and management (including budget) plans, and to demonstrate the successful direction of entire evaluation projects. Finally, the background of the academician should reflect productivity in conceptual and research work in some substantive area.

A fourth, and last, consideration in training evaluators is related to the changing face of the field. Conceptually, it is a young area of study. Technically it is old. Professionals should be trained to function as data gatherers in many roles; academicians should be trained in specialty areas outside of evaluation, yet maintain strong interest in conducting evaluation research. Then, as the face of evaluation changes--as it is certain to do--job security will not be a concern. Evaluation trainees should be aware of new developments and be prepared to contribute to them as they appear. Academicians in particular should be prepared to critique new directions in educational evaluation, knowing that the area is still growing and changing but recognizing that the change only increases the need for direction.

A text on educational evaluation recently crossed my desk. On the inside leaf of the cover the authors had stated, "This new book contains everything professional educators need to know about program evaluation..." At last, I thought, here is an evaluation training program is one nice, neat package. My expectations were not met.